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ABSTRACT

Becoming a member of any organization involves socialization. When teachers move, change work groups, or transfer, they must be "reinducted" or "resocialized" to fit into the new environment. Administrators should recognize two important differences between beginning and relocated teachers--the mindset each brings to the first year of service and the way each is perceived by incumbent staff members. Whereas the beginner needs to be initiated into both the profession and the organization, the veteran brings an already formed sense of a teacher's role. Also, experienced teachers may be perceived to be familiar with the organization and instantly competent; coworkers are less likely to see experienced newcomers as needing increased support. This article advises administrators to give veteran newcomers a realistic view of the school; become aware of job transition issues and build a similar awareness in the arriving teachers; pay attention to informal socialization processes; assign and/or redistribute faculty responsibilities based on individual teachers' talents; involve veteran newcomers in important activities outside their immediate job descriptions; and provide formal and informal feedback. Job changes require adjustment. Since teachers are indispensable to a school's effectiveness, administrators should make this adjustment as easy as possible. Contains 10 references. (MLH)

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Tips for Principals
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How To Help Experienced Teachers Adjust to a New School

Becoming a member of any organization involves socialization, the process by which a newcomer learns the norms, values, and required behavior patterns of the new group (Schein, 1987).

When teachers move, change work groups, or transfer, they must be "reinducted" or "resocialized" to fit into the new environment. Even a teacher returning to the same site and position from a leave of absence may experience resocialization (Fisher, 1986), due to such significant changes as the adoption of site-based management or a change to block scheduling.

Administrators should recognize at least two important differences between beginning and relocated teachers: the mindset each brings to the first year of service, and the way each is perceived by incumbent members of the organization.

These differences drive unique transition and socialization agendas for each (Feldman and Brett, 1983). While both groups are being socialized to the new school during their first year, the novice is being initiated into the profession as well as into the organization, and is creating a personal conception of the teacher's role. The veteran brings an already formed sense of a teacher's role and must alter it to fit the prevailing climate in the new setting.

This distinction is important. First-year teachers don't have any history in the field to complicate their learning, but the resocialization of experienced teachers may be clouded by past experiences.

Another difference between new teachers and veterans is the way they are perceived by incumbent members of the organization (Feldman and Brett, 1983). Experienced newcomers are expected to be instantly competent. Perhaps because they are so perceived, veterans usually have more immediate opportunities than beginners, but the price is higher performance expectations.

The incumbents' view of the teacher will probably also be shaped by what they know of the situation. Whatever the circumstances, the teachers' new colleagues will probably perceive the new teacher as familiar with the organization, and not stop to consider that the familiarity was gained from a different perspective.

Co-workers are also less likely to see experienced newcomers as needing increased levels of support (Feldman and Brett, 1983). This is unfortunate, because research indicates that interpersonal support plays a major role in our ability to successfully adapt to the changes wrought by transitions in all parts of our lives (Bhagat, 1983).

✓ Inducting Veterans

The following recommendations are presented with two caveats: virtually all the studies supporting them were done outside the field of education, and none are appropriate to every school.

1 Give newcomers a realistic view of the school. Realistic previews of the job generally help adjust newcomer expectations and reduce the differences between anticipated conditions and job realities. They can also establish a sense of trust and honesty, which encourages newcomers to open communication with their new colleagues.

To provide realistic job previews, administrators can develop "transition packets" of materials that include written descriptions of the school and its programs. Teacher group meetings for new employees can present specific information about the school, and a staff person can answer questions newcomers have before, during, or after meetings.

2 Become aware of the nature of job transitions and build a similar awareness in the arriving teachers. Emotional swings, unmet expectations, self-doubts, and uncertainty are part of adjusting to change (Louis, 1980a; 1980b). Both the arriving teachers and the school administrators must be aware of how normal these feelings are. This awareness can be increased through district or school inservice programs.

3 Pay attention to informal socialization processes. Formal socialization practices include exposing new teachers to the district's and building's official literature, training programs, and formal orientations.

While these programs are periodic, informal socialization is continuous, resulting from observations and associations with peers (Fisher, 1986; Latane, 1981). Peers are seen as "experts" about the organization and have the information newcomers want. They also have the power to

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give or withhold social acceptance.

Informal relationships are a common environment for delivering what Stohl calls "memorable messages" (Stohl, 1986). These are messages that carry a lesson about living and working in the organization and are most often delivered early in a person's organizational experience, frequently by a superior, and most often in informal settings.

Because newcomers learn the value system of a smaller work group much faster than they learn the value system of an entire organization (Schein, 1987), it may be a good idea to assign experienced newcomers to team teaching projects, block scheduled classes, or other collaborative programs. In addition to initiating an immediate relationship with colleagues, the teaching team may provide a safe environment for the new teacher to propose ideas and receive feedback on their viability in the new setting.

4 The arrival of an experienced teacher, especially if he or she has particular skills, may offer an opportunity to redistribute teaching responsibilities among the faculty members. If workable, this can positively affect team unity and morale.

Assigning responsibilities that correspond to a person's individual talents is a way of recognizing professional status, which is an important element in building a new employee's commitment to the school and district.

5 Involve veteran newcomers in important activities outside their immediate job descriptions and ensure they have at least as much responsibility as they had at their previous school.

Newcomers should be encouraged to sit on committees, engage in staff activities, and assume responsibility for various projects. This demonstrates a professional confidence in that person.

This involvement also lets newcomers see how other teachers make judgments, handle new ideas, resolve conflicts, etc.

6 Provide feedback. Even the best performers can interpret the absence of feedback as disappointment or disinterest on the part of supervisors (Feldman and Arnold, 1983). Without feedback, newcomers are left to gain their information from observing how others react to what they do. This involves a high level of inference, which is ever subject to error—especially if the inferences are made in light of past experiences and the accepted norms of a former school (Ashford and Cummings, 1983).

Frequent formal and informal feedback may help reduce stress-producing uncertainty (Louis, 1980a).

Arrange for regular formal and informal evaluation sessions with teachers new to the campus and encourage other administrators and department chairs to do the same.

Another way to open communication is to foster links between newcomers and non-supervising administrators. This encourages the veteran teachers to ask questions without feeling ignorant or incompetent (Louis, 1980a).

✓ Conclusion

Job changes require adjustment. When the person who is changing jobs is as important to the effective functioning of a school as a teacher, administrators help both the person and the school when they make that adjustment as easy as possible.

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